



# Los Angeles County Drug Court Program

Third Annual Report  
to the  
Board of Supervisors

May 17, 2000

## Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee

Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair  
Sheriff Leroy Baca, Vice Chair  
Robert Mimura, Executive Director

### **Drug Court Oversight Subcommittee**

Judge Rudolph Diaz, Chair  
Public Defender Michael P. Judge, Vice Chair

### **Supervising Drug Court Judge**

Judge Michael A. Tynan

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Judge Michael A. Tynan

**DRUG COURT OVERSIGHT  
SUBCOMMITTEE**  
Judge Rudolph Diaz, Chair  
Michael P. Judge, Vice Chair

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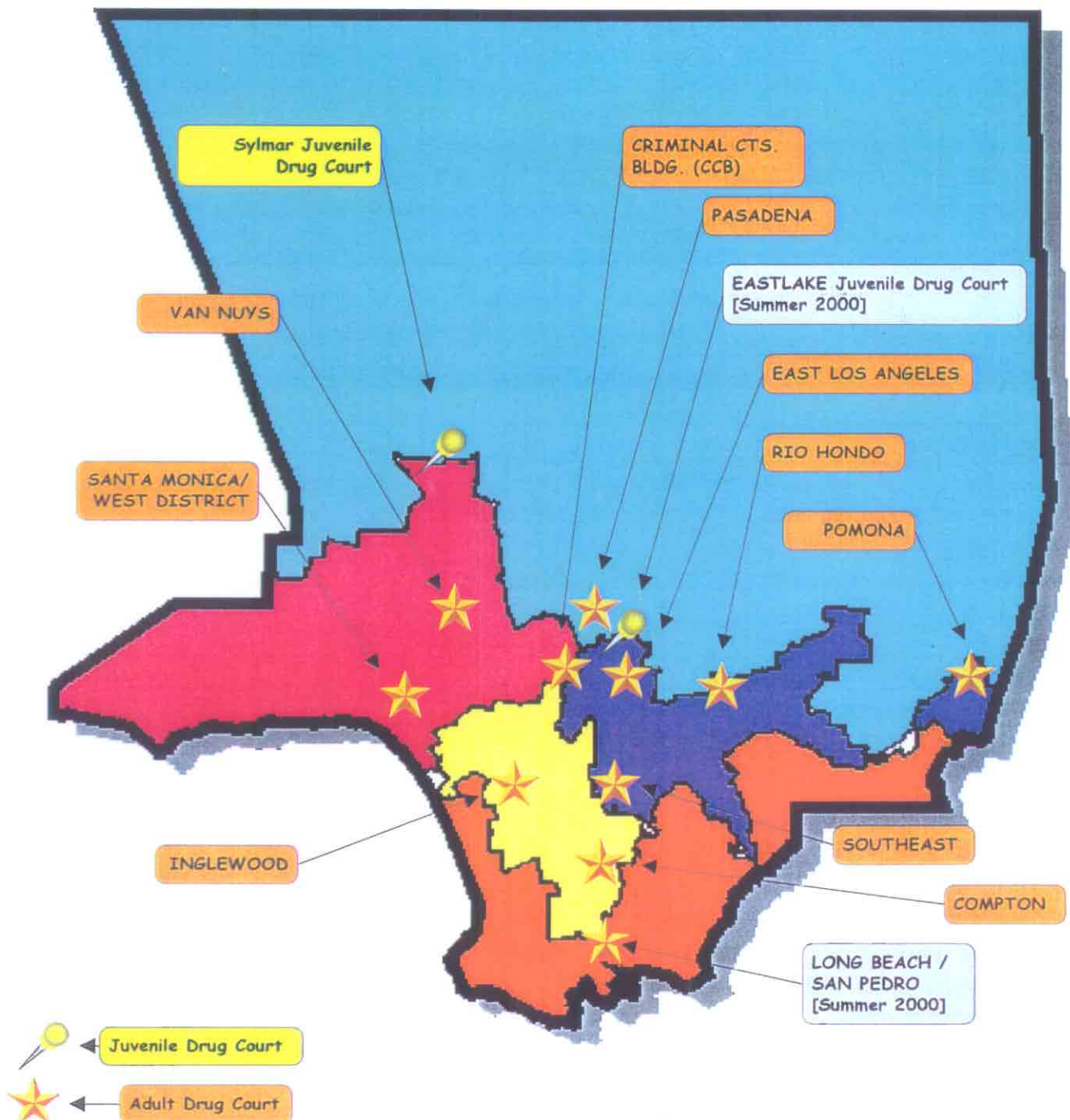
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Los Angeles County

# Drug Court Programs

May 2000



Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee  
Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair



In 1994, Los Angeles Municipal Court and the Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee (CCJCC) established the County's first Drug Court Program at the downtown Criminal Courts Building. Within two months, a second project was implemented at the Rio Hondo Municipal Court in El Monte. These two pilot programs were not only the beginning of the Los Angeles County Drug Court Program, they were also the genesis of a movement to revolutionize the justice system response to drug addiction and crime.

Under the leadership of the courts, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Probation Department, the Alcohol and Drug Program Administration of the Department of Health Services and the Board of Supervisors, Drug Courts have successfully expanded beyond the first pilot sites to twelve locations. Each of the programs is independently operated by the sponsoring court, but all participate in a collaborative planning process, share critical resources, and are now tied to a common data and case management system. The County's Drug Court Programs are recognized throughout the country for their excellence and collectively they represent the nation's first integrated multi-jurisdiction Drug Court system.

## **WHAT IS A DRUG COURT**

Drug Courts are totally unique in the criminal justice environment because they are built upon an intensive collaborative relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment professionals. The resulting partnership has led to the development of a comprehensive and extremely structured regimen of treatment and recovery services that centers on the authority of the court and personal involvement of the Drug Court Judge. Through the creation of a non-adversarial courtroom atmosphere, the Judge heads a team of court officers, staff and treatment counselors all working in concert to support the participant's recovery. The Drug Court Program also provides a structure of intense supervision based on frequent drug testing and court appearances. By closely monitoring participants, the court is able to actively support the recovery process and reacting swiftly to impose appropriate therapeutic sanctions or to reinstate criminal proceedings when participants cannot comply with the program. Together, the Drug Court Judge, prosecutor, defense attorney and treatment professionals maintain a critical balance of support, encouragement, supervision and authority.

### **[ATTACHMENT A: *Drug Court Key Elements*]**

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY DRUG COURTS: MAY 1994-2000**

Over the past six years the courts and CCJCC have collaborated on the development and implementation of twelve local Drug Court programs. There are currently ten fully operational Community Drug Court programs serving all but two of the County's twelve Superior Court Districts. An eleventh program in the Long Beach / San Pedro area is scheduled for implementation by Summer 2000 and plans are under consideration for a



twelfth program to serve the Antelope Valley. With the addition of the proposed Antelope Valley site, the Drug Court Program will have completed the basic framework for a countywide system of programs that are within reach of every community in Los Angeles County.

In addition to its Community Drug Courts, the County also has two specialized Drug Court programs that were first implemented by the Superior Court in late 1998. These programs were based on the fundamental principles and core elements of the Community Drug Court System, but restructured to meet the unique needs and legal circumstances of their respective participant populations.

### **COMMUNITY DRUG COURTS**

The County's system of Community Drug Court Programs is predominately of the "pre-guilty plea" diversion design which is intended to provide a treatment alternative to prosecution for non-violent felony drug offenders. However, Community Drug Courts are now evolving into multi-track program models which may include misdemeanor drug offenders and a variety of post-plea participant categories, such as probation violators and defendants who have pled guilty as a condition for admission into the program. For those who have entered guilty pleas, the entry of judgement in their case is deferred until they successfully complete the 12-month Drug Court Program. For those who fail the program, judgement on the guilty plea is entered and the case proceeds directly to the sentencing phase.

With the exception of probation violators who are typically referred to Drug Court by the sentencing judge, all potential Drug Court participants are screened for eligibility and suitability within 48 hours of arrest and are brought before the Drug Court Judge for admission to the program. Once accepted, drug testing and intensive treatment begin immediately. In lieu of prosecution and incarceration, the participant must agree to complete a rigorous 12-month program that includes: intensive outpatient treatment; self-help groups; optional acupuncture treatment; mandatory drug testing; and numerous court appearances before the Drug Court Judge who oversees each case from beginning to end.

The participant must progress through three distinct program phases based upon strict performance and compliance requirements. **[ATTACHMENT B: *The Drug Court Phases*]** The Drug Court judge also utilizes a progressive range of therapeutic sanctions including short-term residential treatment in community-based programs or a specialized drug treatment facility in the County jail. Participants are required to be drug free and must successfully pass through all three distinct treatment phases before they are qualified to "graduate" from the Drug Court Program. Frequent drug testing is mandatory. A typical 12-month program will subject participants to a minimum of 125 drug tests.

Participants must also complete the required number of 12-step self help meetings, participate in individual and group counseling, pay the program fee in full, and be employed or enrolled in an educational/vocational program. Only then will a participant graduate and have the original charge against him or her dismissed. Drug Court participants are introduced to an ongoing process of recovery and rehabilitation based on economic self-sufficiency and total abstinence from illicit/illegal drugs and alcohol.

## **SPECIALIZED DRUG COURTS**

### **Sentenced Offender Drug Court Program**

The Sentenced Offender Drug Court (SODC) Program is an intensive program for convicted, non-violent felony offenders who face state prison commitments due to their criminal records and history of drug addiction. These higher risk offenders have medium to high levels of drug addiction and are offered the SODC program with formal probation as an alternative to state prison. The SODC program is designed for non-violent offenders, specifically excluding persons with prior convictions for serious or violent felonies or those with current charges involving serious or violent felonies or drug trafficking.

Unlike most so-called "re-entry Drug Courts" in other jurisdictions, the Superior Court's SODC program is totally integrated with both the in-custody and post-release treatment components being supervised by a single Drug Court judge and dedicated Drug Court probation officer. All SODC participants spend a mandatory 90 days in the County jail where they are assigned to a specialized drug treatment modular. Following this period of intensive in-custody treatment, participants are typically admitted into community-based transitional housing while they begin a six to nine month phase of comprehensive "outpatient" treatment and intensive drug testing which is directly supervised by the Drug Court judge and Probation Officer.

After completion of the outpatient treatment phase, the offender continues his/her recovery under intensive probation supervision but without the direct monitoring of the Drug Court judge. Court jurisdiction and formal probation supervision continue for the full term mandated by the sentence.

### **Juvenile Drug Courts**

Incorporating the same general principles and program elements as the adult Drug Courts, the Juvenile Drug Court targets nonviolent juvenile offenders with substance abuse problems. Designed for both male and female participants, the mission of the program is to provide an integrated and comprehensive system of treatment for high risk minors and their parents within the highly structured Drug Court setting.



Juvenile Drug Court is a voluntary program which includes regular court appearances before a designated Drug Court judicial officer, intensive supervision by the Probation Department, frequent drug testing and a comprehensive program of treatment services provided by a community-based agency. Individual, group and family counseling sessions are all provided by the treatment agency. Regular attendance at twelve-step meetings (Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous) is required, as is regular and verified school attendance. The involvement of the minor's parents and family members is strongly encouraged and referrals for ancillary services, such as vocational training, job placement services and remedial education, are also made as appropriate. Participants must complete a minimum of 12 months with the program, comply with all program requirements and be drug-free to be considered for graduation from Drug Court.

The County's first pilot program began operations at the Sylmar Juvenile Court facility in July 1998. Since that time, the Drug Court has admitted a total of 99 participants (84 males and 15 females). There are now 43 active participants (35 males and 8 females) and a total of 9 minors (7 males and 2 females) have graduated from the program.

#### Countywide Juvenile Drug Court System

Encouraged by the early successes of the first pilot project in Sylmar, and aided by an infusion of new funding from the County, the Juvenile Drug Court is presently planning for expansion. As with their adult counterparts, Juvenile Drug Courts will be developed as a single countywide system of regional programs through their use of common policies, procedures and program standards. There will also be a centralized system for program monitoring, data collection, reporting and evaluation.

The Court's strategic goal is to develop a program that will target drug-involved juveniles who are at greatest risk of becoming chronic, serious offenders. These high risk juveniles are considered the most appropriate candidates for Drug Court because of their need for an intensive and highly structured program of services, supervision and treatment oriented sanctions.

The regional Juvenile Drug Courts will each retain substantial independence and flexibility in order to be responsive to the unique needs of the different communities that they serve. Localized programs can also be shaped to address specific problems such as the high incidence of particular drugs of abuse, the unusual prevalence of youth gangs or linguistically isolated families. The Court's plan of action calls for a step-by-step expansion beyond the current pilot program at Sylmar, beginning with implementation of one, and possibly two, new sites over the next two years. The Eastlake Juvenile Court in Central Los Angeles has already been identified as the next Juvenile Drug Court site because of its potential as a regional program serving a number of communities in the surrounding area.



The Court's Juvenile Drug Court plan also calls for other enhancements such as establishment of an in-custody treatment program, expanded resources for residential treatment, and creation of a Juvenile Drug Court Data Center.

#### Residential and In-custody Treatment

Currently, the Juvenile Drug Court does not have an in-custody treatment component similar to the Sheriff's Biscailuz Recovery Center for adults. It is the Juvenile Court's intention to work with the Probation Department and ADPA to establish a dedicated 25-bed treatment program at one of the juvenile halls. This facility would allow Drug Court judges to use short-term confinements in a secure therapeutic facility as a treatment sanction. A community-based agency will be selected to operate the treatment component of the in-custody program.

The Court is also seeking additional resources to expand the availability of community-based residential treatment services. The expanded residential beds will serve both as a primary treatment modality for youth with serious substance abuse and delinquency problems, and a necessary "step-down" between custody treatment and community-based day or outpatient services.

#### Juvenile Drug Court Data Center

The proposed Drug Court Data Center will provide the court with a centralized database and automated management information system. Current plans call for development of the Data Center as a module of adult Drug Court system (DCMIS), in order to benefit from the economies of a shared system architecture. The Juvenile DCMIS module would be designed to ensure a totally independent and securable database with operational and administrative functions that have been expressly designed for a multi-site Juvenile Drug Court Program.

### **DRUG COURT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (DCMIS)**

Paralleling growth and expansion of the County Drug Court Program has been the increasing need to automate the collection and management of Drug Court case information. To address this need, CCJCC's Drug Court Oversight Subcommittee, the Information Systems Advisory Body (ISAB) and the Internal Services Department joined together in a collaborative multi-agency effort to develop a countywide Drug Court computer system. This Internet/intranet system, known as the Drug Court Management Information System (DCMIS), was completed in March 2000 with successful linkages to all 11 of the County's adult Drug Court sites and treatment providers. It is believed that DCMIS may have the distinction of being the nation's first operational Drug Court data

system to utilize "WEB BROWSER" technology as the basis for inter-connecting multiple courts and treatment agencies into a single database system.

The DCMIS data repository provides day-to-day operational support to the County's Drug Courts and serves as a centralized source for statistical information that monitors and evaluates court-level as well as countywide program outcomes and trends. The primary operational support processes of the system center on participant identification and tracking information and fall into three major categories: (1) Eligibility/Suitability; (2) Treatment; and (3) Court Monitoring. The administrative processes of DCMIS fall into two major categories: (1) Statistical Reports and (2) L.A. County Drug Court Program Home Page.

DCMIS is an Internet/Intranet database application which selectively permits access to the data by a variety of system users. However, to guarantee confidentiality, all DCMIS users are registered and assigned specific data access privileges. This classification system ensures that access to protected treatment or criminal justice information is restricted to specific groups of authorized DCMIS users. Only DCMIS/CCJCC system administrators have access to the entire DCMIS database.

To ensure the integrity of the system, there are three distinct levels of security. At the first level, Internet access by community-based Drug Court treatment agencies to the County's "intranet" (known as LANET) is controlled by the use of electronic SECURID cards which limit access to registered treatment personnel. The second level of security limits access to the DCMIS application to registered users with passwords and Personal Identification Numbers (PIN's). And, at the third level, access to the data itself is controlled by restricting the access rights of specific groups of DCMIS users.  
**(ATTACHMENT D: DCMIS Security Levels)**

#### **DRUG COURT ACCOMPLISHMENTS 1999-2000**

- Community Drug Courts increased the total number of program participants from 517 to 755 (an increase of 46%) as the result of additional funding provided by the Board of Supervisors
- Drug Court Program expanded the scope of preplea programs by establishing a multi-track "Community Drug Court" model that includes various categories of eligible postplea offender categories
- CCJCC and ISAB completed development and implementation of the adult DCMIS including installation at twenty-two sites and classroom training for all users



- The Sheriff's Department reopens the Biscailuz jail facility as a dedicated center for substance abuse treatment and recovery services
- Pomona Municipal Court implemented the County's 10<sup>th</sup> Community Drug Court Program
- Compton Drug Court, in collaboration with the Juvenile Court and CCJCC, developed and implemented a pilot project to coordinate court supervision when a Drug Court and a Dependency Court are simultaneously involved
- L.A. County Alcohol and Drug Program Administration (ADPA) and CCJCC developed and initiated the Request For Proposal (RFP) process for two new Drug Courts:
  1. Long Beach / San Pedro Drug Court
  2. Eastlake Juvenile Drug Court
- CCJCC sponsored its 3<sup>rd</sup> countywide Drug Court Symposium focusing on the psychopharmacology of addiction

## **DRUG COURT SUCCESS**

The CCJCC has been responsible for overseeing an on-going countywide program for monitoring and evaluating Drug Court programs since the inception of the first project in May 1994. As the most critical part of this process, the Probation Department's Pretrial Services now conducts thorough analyses of criminal history records for all Drug Court graduates on a quarterly basis to track recidivism trend data. In addition to maintaining recidivism data and on-going Drug Court workloads, the Committee has also collaborated with universities and independent researchers to conduct periodic studies which focus on specific aspects of Drug Court processes and program outcomes.

As of April 30, 2000 the total number of active participants in the County's Community Drug Court program reached 755 participants. Of this number, 75% were males and 25% were females. The cumulative total of Drug Court graduates was 927. For further detail on individual programs, see (**ATTACHMENT E: Los Angeles County Drug Court Programs**).

Following are statistical highlights from Probation Pretrial Services data and from research performed by an independent consultant firm.

**Recidivism Report, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, FY 1999-00** (Probation Pretrial Services)  
**(ATTACHMENT F: *Drug Court Recidivism*)**

- ◆ As of March 31, 2000, there were 891 graduates from Community Drug Courts. Of this number:

652 (73.2%) Had NOT been arrested for ANY offense since graduation

239 (26.8%) Had been rearrested for some offense since graduation *(Including minor Vehicle Code violations and cases which were shown as dismissals or D.A. rejects)*

- ◆ Of the 239 arrests recorded, 59 (25%) involved Vehicle Code violations. Significantly, only 17 these Vehicle Code arrests (29%) involved charges related to alcohol and/or drugs.

**Evaluation of Los Angeles Drug Courts, May 2000** (The Center for Applied Local Research)  
**(ATTACHMENT G: *Abstract & Executive Summary*)**

In addition to the on-going monitoring of Drug Court graduates performed by the Probation Department, CCJCC also retained the services of an independent consultant to conduct a one-time evaluation of the County's Drug Court program. Finalized in May 2000, this study focused on the first four Drug Courts (Criminal Courts Building, Rio Hondo, Pasadena, and Santa Monica/West Side) between 1994 and 1997. The study included an analysis of Drug Court program completion rates and participant recidivism as well as comparisons to equivalent populations of felony drug defendants and offenders admitted to the "pre-1996" Penal Code Section 1000 Diversion Program. The recidivism study followed each group for a full year.

- ◆ **Drug Court Participant Profile**

Average age:	35 years
Gender:	80% male
Ethnicity:	Hispanics (43%); African-American (30%); White (23%)
Criminal History:	Average 7-8 prior arrests; 1 felony conviction; 3 misdemeanor convictions
Prior Treatment:	90% reported no prior treatment



◆ Drug Court Completion Rate

- 75% of all participants admitted into Drug Court successfully complete the program and graduate

◆ Recidivism

- 80% of the Drug Court participants graduates remained arrest free throughout the study period as compared to 63% of the Diversion Program participants and 49% of the felony defendants who had no program exposure.
- Of those offenders who participated in the Drug Court Program but did not graduate, 67% remained arrest free.
- Of those offenders who were re-arrested, the average "time to failure" ranged from a high of 415 days for Drug Court participants to a low of 244 days for diversion offenders and 232 days for felony defendants.

## INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

In order to succeed, the Drug Court Program must have a broad and on-going base of support. The program continues to rely on a coalition of agencies, organizations and elected leaders. Under the general auspices of the CCJCC's Drug Court Oversight Subcommittee, this coalition includes the judicial officers and administrators of the unified Los Angeles Superior Court, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Probation Department, the Alcohol and Drug Program Administration of the Department of Health Services and local law enforcement agencies. (**ATTACHMENT H: Drug Court Program Organization Chart**) To provide additional leadership and coordination, the unified Superior Court has also designated a Supervising Drug Court Judge. The Subcommittee provides programmatic and technical assistance; coordinates countywide data collection and program evaluation activities; and facilitates consensus on countywide policies and program standards. The Subcommittee is responsible for collaboratively developing general policy guidelines for all of the County's Community Drug Courts. Known as *The Drug Court Standards and Practices*, this policy document continues to evolve and is now being revised for a fifth publication.

## THE FUTURE

Building on six years of collaboration, CCJCC and the unified Superior Court will continue their partnership in expanding the County's system of Drug Court programs. In the coming year, we will see major developments in the area of Juvenile Drug Courts as plans are implemented for a second project site at the Eastlake Juvenile Court and for an in-custody Drug Court treatment facility. We will also see new initiatives for the development of enhanced or specialized Drug Court services, such as those involving partnerships with the Dependency Court System, the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Mental Health. We will also continue to see a steady increase in number of offenders being served by our adult Drug Courts. With the availability of additional resources for treatment and the eventual implementation of new programs in the Long Beach/ San Pedro Area and the Antelope Valley, Community Drug Court services will soon be available to virtually every community in Los Angeles County.



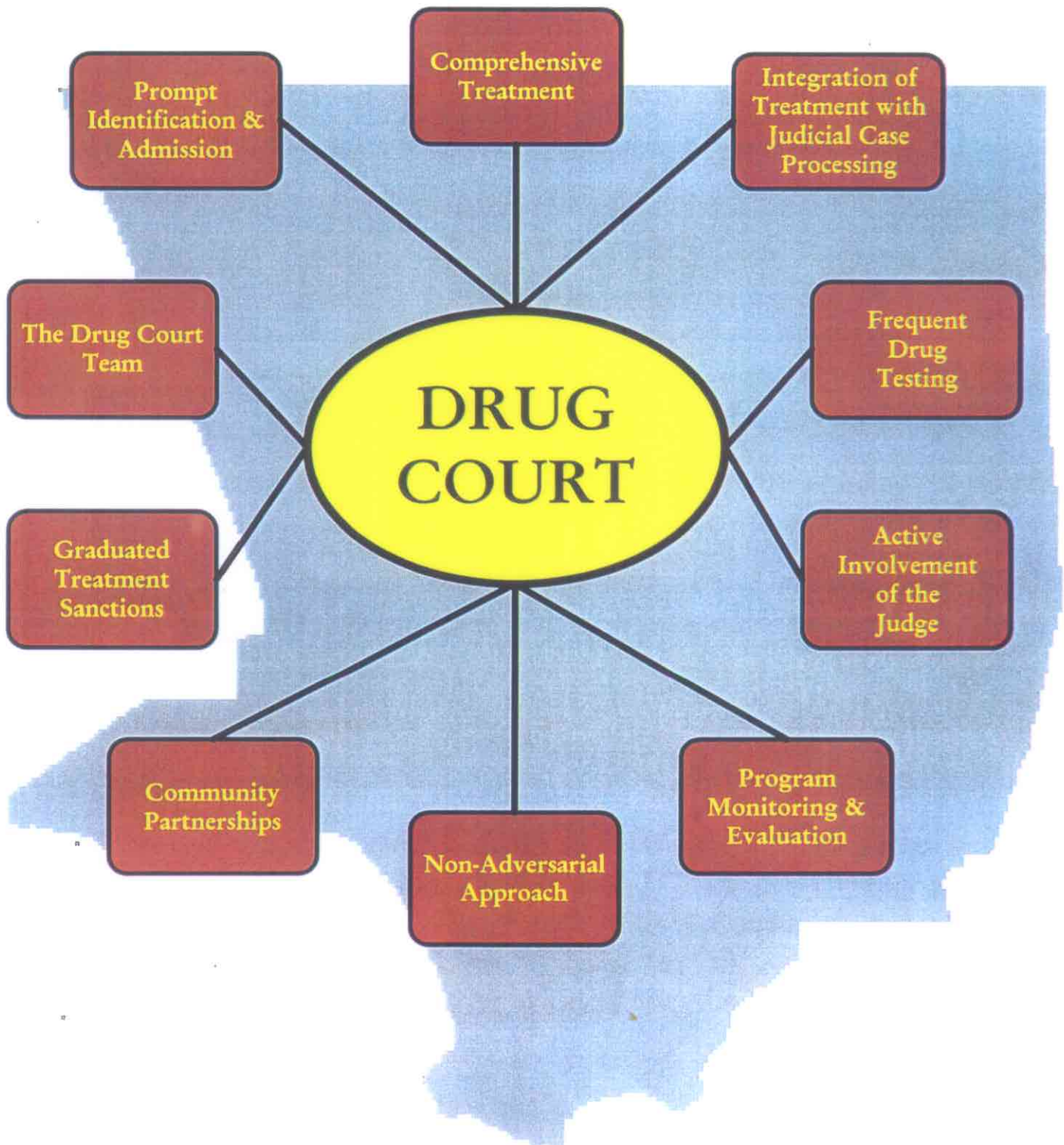


# ATTACHMENTS

# KEY ELEMENTS OF DRUG COURT

Los Angeles County Drug Court Program  
Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee

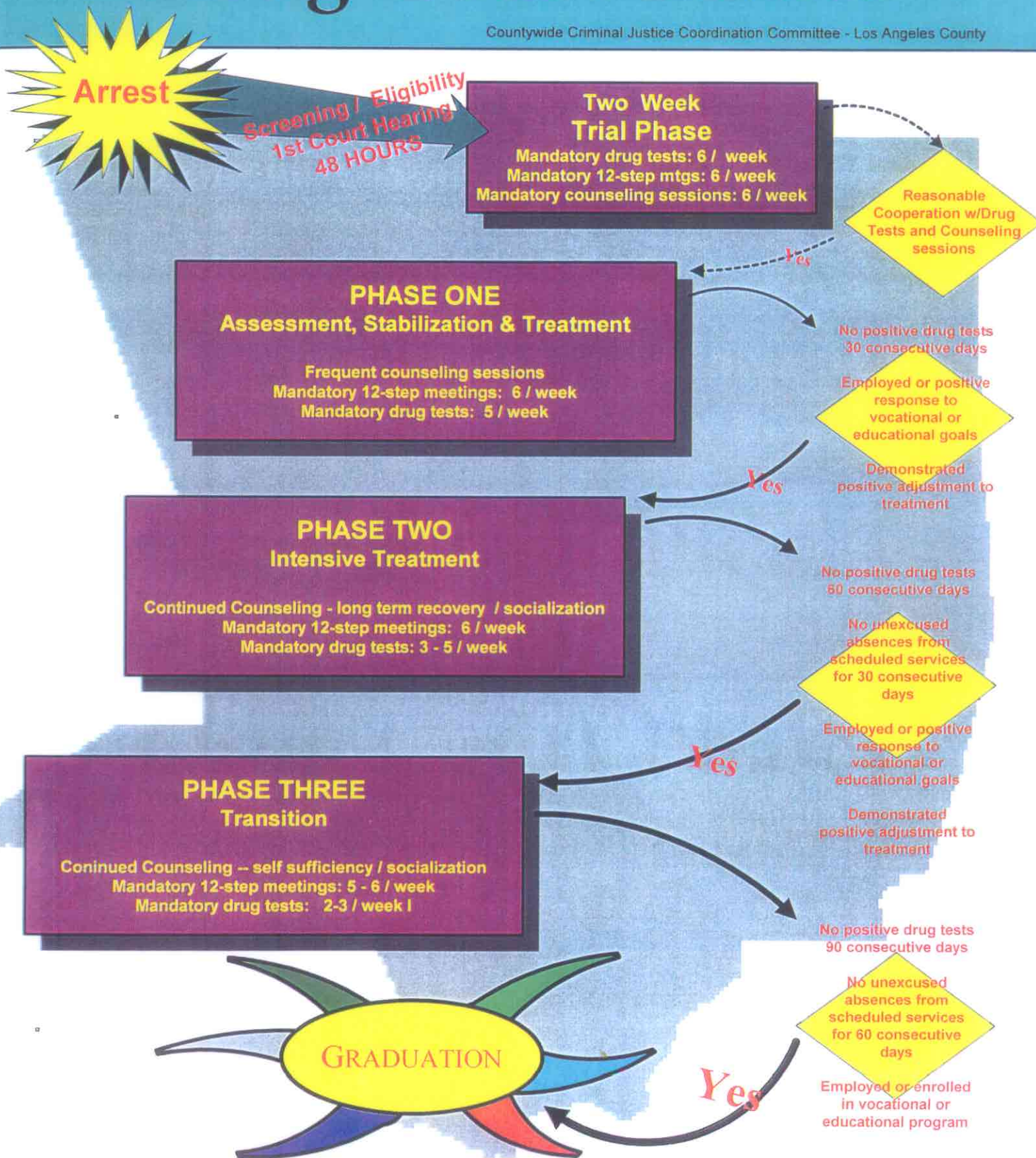
May 2000





# Drug Court Phases

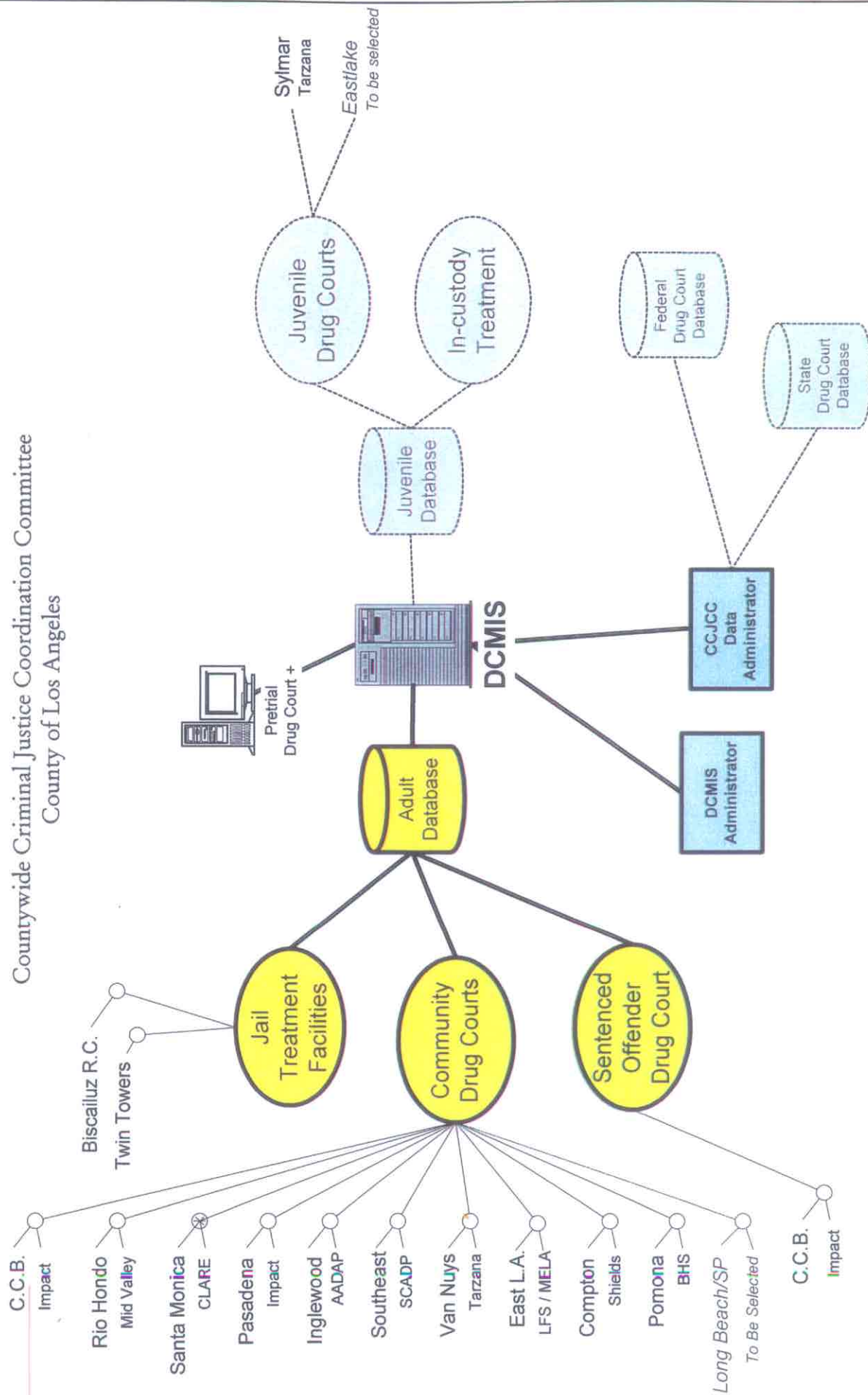
Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee - Los Angeles County



# Drug Court Management Information System

## DCMIS

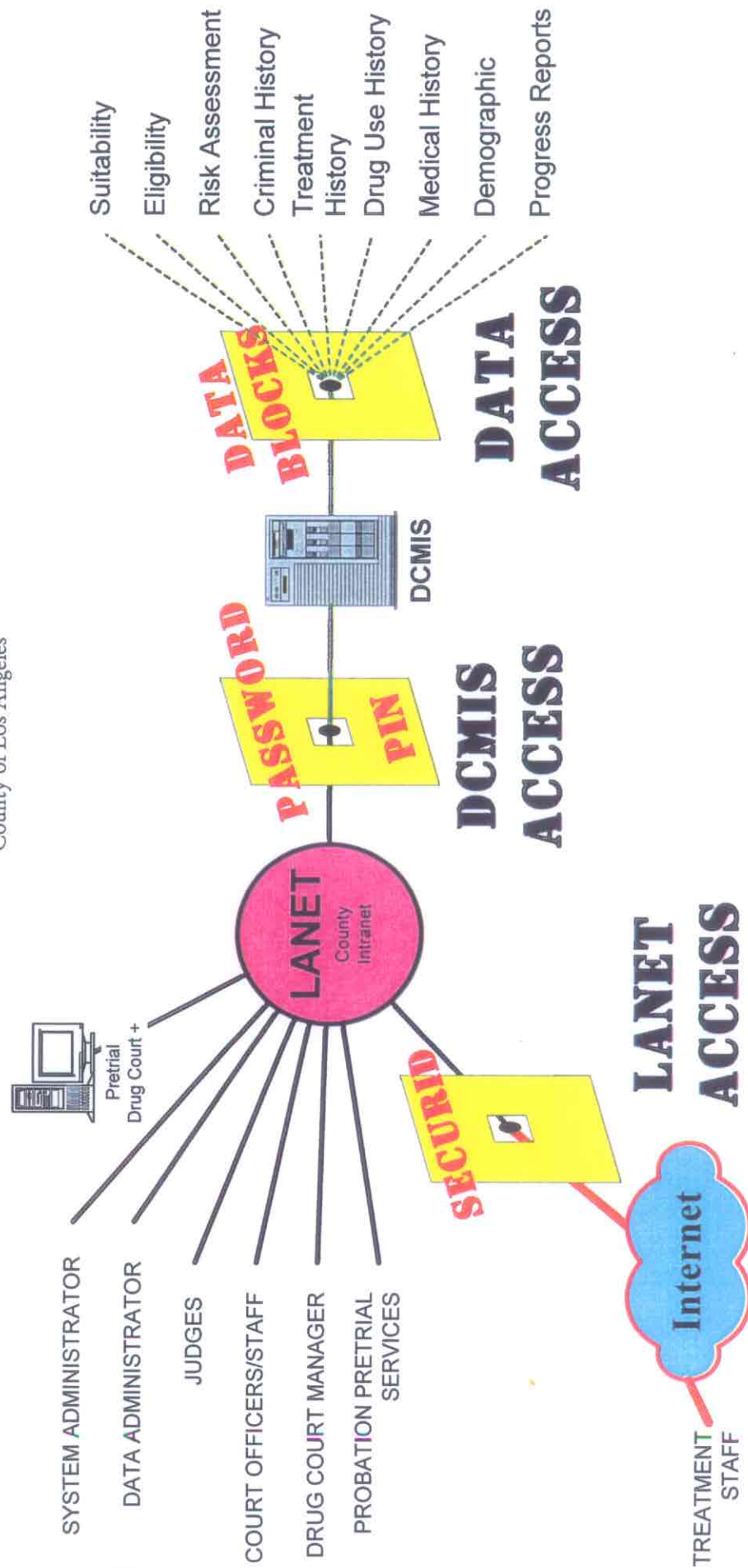
Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee  
County of Los Angeles





# DCMIS SECURITY LEVELS

Drug Court Management Information System  
Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee  
County of Los Angeles



# LOS ANGELES COUNTY DRUG COURT PROGRAMS

Report Date: May 1, 2000

COMMUNITY DRUG COURTS						
	Start Date	Years/Mos. in Operation	Current Participants	% Male	% Female	Graduates to Date
Compton	Apr-98	2 yr.	52	82.7	17.3	35
East Los Angeles	May-98	1 yr., 11 mos.	38	86.8	13.2	22
Inglewood	Apr-97	3 yr.	91	68.1	31.9	58
Los Angeles	May-94	5 yr., 11 mo.	164	82.3	17.7	416
Van Nuys	Jun-97	2 yr., 10 mo.	58	63.8	36.2	53
Pasadena	May-95	4 yr., 11 mos.	32	68.8	31.3	68
Rio Hondo	Jul-94	5 yr., 9 mos.	140	73.6	26.4	133
Santa Monica/West	Jan-96	4 yr., 3 mos.	56	73.2	26.8	101
Southeast	May-97	2 yr., 11 mo.	41	73.2	26.8	41
Pomona	Jun-99	10 mo.,	60	71.7	28.3	0
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>732</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>927</b>

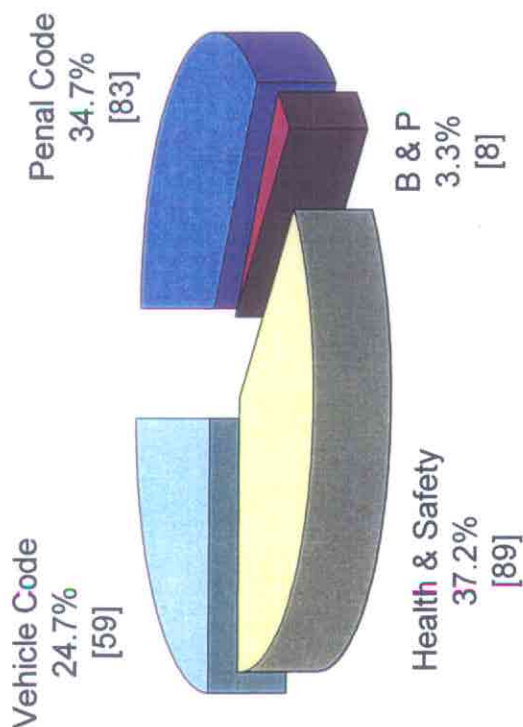
SPECIALIZED DRUG COURTS						
	Start Date	Years/Mos. in Operation	Current Participants	% Male	% Female	Graduates to Date
Sentenced Offender	Aug-98	1 yr., 9 mos.	133	75.2	24.8	0
Juvenile, Sylmar	Jul-98	1yr., 10 mos.	43	81.4	18.6	9
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>176</b>			<b>9</b>



# Drug Court Recidivism

All Program Graduates

[891 Graduates: June 1995 - March 2000]



**Re-arrest Breakdown**  
[239 Arrests]

**ARRESTS**

26.8%

239

**NO ARRESTS**

73.2%

652

~ Abstract & Executive Summary ~

# Evaluation of Los Angeles County Drug Courts

1994 -1997

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## PROJECT ABSTRACT

### EVALUATION OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY DRUG COURTS

The purpose of C.A.L. Research's study was to evaluate the four Los Angeles County Drug Courts' effectiveness in terms of program completion, and recidivism. It also provides a first step in analyzing the treatment costs for these programs. The process evaluation included a sample of 803 of the participants admitted between 1994 and 1997. Information was collected on the characteristics of participants, length of time in treatment, retention and graduation rates, and program costs. This report has three main parts: (1) Process Evaluation; (2) Outcome Evaluation; and (3) Preliminary Analysis of Drug Court Treatment Costs. Below, the major findings and policy implications from this study are summarized.

The major process findings are:

- The average drug court participant is a 35-year old single male of minority status. Less than 20% are female. Nearly 40% percent are of Hispanic origin and 34 percent are African-American. More than half of the participants are single and about one quarter are divorced, separated or widowed;
- Participants averaged 7 prior arrests, but only 1 felony conviction and 3 misdemeanor convictions. Over time there has been a significantly greater proportion of high-risk level participants admitted to the program, but the majority are classified as medium risk;
- Over half of participants reported cocaine as the primary drug of choice, with 18% reporting heroin and 14% amphetamines. Over 90 percent of participants reported no prior involvement in treatment;

- Over half of all participants who entered between 1994 and 1996 graduated from the program prior to December 31, 1997. Graduation rates nearly doubled from 34% to 65% once programs became more stable (six months after initial implementation); and
- The current retention rate is about 75 percent. About one-third of those admitted are terminated within the first six months. Drug court graduates averaged 12 months in treatment.

Findings from the outcome evaluation are summarized below:

- When we use any new arrest as the indicator of recidivism, from program entry to minimum one-year follow-up, only 20% of Drug Court participants had a new arrest. In contrast, 37% of diversion offenders and 51% of felony defendants had a new arrest;
- For those who were re-arrested, the average time to failure ranged from 232 days for felony defendants and 244 days for diversion offenders up to 415 days for drug court participants, regardless of graduation status;
- Drug Court graduates had lower rates of re-arrest (20%) than those who were terminated from the program (33%);
- If we use any drug arrest, including DUI, as the measure of recidivism, only 13% drug court participants had a new drug arrest. In contrast, 20% of diversion offenders and 30% of felony defendants had a new drug arrest;
- For those who were re-arrested (any new drug arrest), the average time to failure ranged from 241 days for felony defendants and 263 days for diversion offenders up to 450 days for drug court participants, regardless of graduation status;
- Drug Court graduates had a much lower rate of re-arrest ( 10%) than those who were terminated from the program (19%);



- Regardless of which recidivism measure of re-arrest we use, high risk offenders tend to fail more quickly than those of low or medium risk. In addition, Program graduates had lower rates of re-arrest than those who were terminated from the program. We did not find any significant difference in new arrest by gender, ethnicity, or program size
- Overall, when the experimental cohort was compared to offenders on diversion and offenders who went to trial, the proportion re-arrested was lower and the time to re-arrest was longer. In terms of recidivism, Drug Court seems to be more effective for medium or high risk participants, than low risk ones.

What are the costs of this success? The final section of this study presents the results of the analyses of drug court treatment costs. This is, however, a first step in exploring the drug court treatment cost. The cost model we used is limited in scope because the data included mostly direct service costs and a minimum of variable service costs. Moreover, many costs included in this model do not belong to the traditional treatment costs. Therefore, drug court treatment costs can vary extensively for different types of clients (e.g., level of difficulty) and for the types of services provided (e.g., drug test, food, housing, and transportation assistance).

Our preliminary findings for drug court treatment costs are:

- The average program treatment cost is between \$15 and \$22 per client per day. Compared to the California average cost per day of \$15 per person for substance abuse treatment, the smaller treatment programs started from above and below this average and later converged towards the California average. Cost per client day for the larger program, however, climbed to almost twice the California average cost by the third year;
- Drug court treatment costs varied significantly by program size. To the extent that smaller programs provide more services, the larger the variable costs;
- The average yearly cost per client for program graduates ranged from a low of \$3,706 to a high of \$8,924. Again, the reasons for this wide variation are due to variability of client caseload, of treatment modality, of staff utilization, and of services that are needed for the

drug court. In comparison to the estimated average yearly cost of probation (\$1,200), prison (\$16,500), or residential drug treatment (\$13,000), *the drug court program appears to be a reasonable alternative that has higher rates of success;*

- The important variables for improving drug courts include: more effective screening of clients; matching treatment modalities to individual clients; providing a service mix that matches the range of client-specific need; closely matching the treatment services to client phase development; and maintaining ongoing data collection, monitoring, and data analysis;
- Finally, despite the favorable outcomes of this study, further research is necessary to determine whether this early success has continued and if it is demonstrated in the next generation of drug courts that were implemented between 1997 and 2000. Ultimately, the results of this evaluation are limited because the study only included the original four drug courts from inception to 1997. Further research is needed to compare these four courts to the new drug court programs currently in operation in LA County and to provide a more long-term follow-up of drug court participants in comparison to other felony drug offenders.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The purpose of C.A.L. Research's study was to evaluate the four Los Angeles County Drug Courts' impact and effectiveness in terms of program completion, and recidivism. It also provides a first step in analyzing the treatment costs for these programs. This report has three main parts: (1) Process Evaluation; (2) Outcome Evaluation; and (3) Preliminary Analysis of Drug Court Treatment Costs.

### A Brief Background on Drug Courts

Diversionary drug court programs that combine drug testing and treatment with judicial supervision and sanctions were first implemented in Los Angeles in 1994. Faced with overcrowding in prisons and jails as well as burgeoning court calendars due to the influx of drug offenders into the system, a group of judicial leaders, criminal justice and drug treatment officials convened a task force to resolve the situation. Nearly six years later, there are now eleven adult drug court programs operating throughout Los Angeles County. This brief summarizes the findings of process and outcome evaluations of the Los Angeles County Drug Court Programs conducted by C.A.L. Research.

The LA County Drug Court Program is a pre-plea program designed for felony offenders charged with possession of narcotics or of a controlled substance. Defendants who are found to be eligible and suitable for the program are placed in a three-phase treatment program that incorporates daily drug

*Drug court programs are intended to offer an alternative to the traditional punishments of jail, prison, or probation.*

testing, group counseling, and judicial supervision. Treatment is provided by locally contracted providers certified by the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. Participants who comply with the program requirements and meet the criteria for graduation have their cases dismissed.

Over the past ten years the courts, probation departments, and substance abuse treatment service providers have pursued various methods to address the growing numbers of substance abusers who become involved with the criminal justice system. These agencies were seeking an alternative to the traditional punishments of jail, prison, and probation, which were no longer effective. Drug court programs offer one of the most promising approaches that have emerged in

attempting to break the substance user's cycle of repeated involvement with the criminal justice system.

Drug courts are a collaborative effort of criminal justice and judicial representatives, law enforcement, and health service providers. Treatment drug courts are non-adversarial in nature where representatives from these different agencies work as a team. Drug courts provide intensive treatment and individual or group counseling combined with court supervision and sanctions. Due to the fact that this approach is still relatively new, drug court programs vary by jurisdiction in structure and design.

In Los Angeles County the first drug court program was implemented in May 1994 in the downtown Los Angeles area. The Rio Hondo court located in El Monte was implemented shortly thereafter in July 1994. The Pasadena drug court became operational in May 1995 and the Western Regional District Court at Santa Monica was inaugurated in January 1996. There are more than ten drug court programs currently operating throughout Los Angeles County and there are plans to continue expanding.

### **Drug Court Process in Los Angeles**

In Los Angeles County, participation in the drug court programs is voluntary. Participants are primarily recruited through two ways: arrests made by law enforcement and referrals from other courts and criminal justice agencies. For offenders who have been taken into custody, the option to enter into this program is made available to offenders within 48 hours of their arrest. Defendants who are not in custody and/or referred by other courts or agencies are assessed for eligibility and suitability as soon as possible. Potential participants are assessed for eligibility then interviewed to determine their level of interest and motivation to participate.

Drug Court Program participants progress through three phases of drug treatment, which vary in time and intensity of supervision, although each phase includes participation in individual and group counseling and 12-step meetings. In addition participants are required to submit to drug testing, beginning at 5 times weekly, then gradually decreasing. The length of treatment averages about twelve months, depending on the needs of the individual offender. The drug court judge determines graduation from each phase and program completion on the condition that the participant has satisfied the established minimum criteria for advancement.



## Evaluation Design

The study conducted by C.A.L. Research focused on the first four drug courts implemented between 1994 and 1996. The process evaluation included a sample of 803 of the 819 participants admitted between 1994 and 1997. Information was collected on the characteristics of participants, length of time in treatment, retention and graduation rates, and program costs.

Because the Drug Court Program was already in operation at the time this evaluation began, we

### *Study Questions*

1. *What type of offenders participated in the drug court program in terms of demographics, criminal history, or severity of substance use?*
2. *What is the average time in treatment and how many participants complete the program?*
3. *What are the costs of providing treatment?*
4. *How do drug court participants compare to other groups of felony defendants in terms of rates of recidivism?*

used a retrospective (quasi-experimental) design. Participants in the four original drug court programs were compared to two comparison groups of offenders on diversion and felony defendants. The four sites that are included in this study are: the LA Municipal Court Central Division; the Rio Hondo Municipal Court; the Pasadena Municipal Court; and the Santa Monica/West District Superior Court.

We divided this report into three sections. The first section presents the results of the process evaluation, the second focuses on outcomes, and the third explores program costs. For purposes of the evaluation, we identified three groups of participants (cohorts) by date of entry into the drug court program. The first cohort, are those participants who entered during the demonstrational time period (the first six months of program implementation within each site). The experimental cohort includes those participants who entered after the initial six-month period (prior to the end of 1996). The third cohort includes persons who entered the program in 1997.

The major process findings from this study are summarized below:

- The average drug court participant is a 35-year old single male of minority status. Less than 20% are female. Nearly 40% percent are of Hispanic origin and 34 percent are African-American. More than half of the participants are single and about one quarter are divorced, separated or widowed;
- Participants averaged 7 prior arrests, but only 1 felony conviction and 3 misdemeanor convictions. Over time there has been a significantly greater proportion of high-risk level participants admitted to the program, but the majority are classified as medium risk;
- Over half of participants reported cocaine as the primary drug of choice, with 18% reporting heroin and 14% amphetamines. Over 90 percent of participants reported no prior involvement in treatment;
- Over half of all participants who entered between 1994 and 1996 graduated from the program prior to December 31, 1997. Graduation rates nearly doubled from 34% to 65% once programs became more stable (six months after initial implementation); and
- The current retention rate is about 75 percent. About one-third of those admitted are terminated within the first six months. Drug court graduates averaged 12 months in treatment.

On average, over half of all participants graduated within twelve months. Following the initial implementation period, graduation rates increased and termination rates decreased

In the second section of the report, we focus on the outcome evaluation that includes an analysis of the recidivism of drug court participants in comparison to offenders on diversion versus those who went to trial. We also analyze time to new arrest for participants and the comparison groups. This section also makes the successes of the drug court program most evident.



(Our sample included 285 drug court participants who entered the program between 1995 and 1996, and two matched comparison groups of defendants charged with felony drug possession who participated in PC 1000 Drug Diversion (N=298) or went to trial (N=251) during the same time period. Recidivism, (new arrest) data were obtained on all three groups from initial arrest until December 31, 1997.)

Findings from the outcome evaluation are summarized below:

- When we use any new arrest as the indicator of recidivism, from program entry to minimum one-year follow-up, only 20% of Drug Court participants had a new arrest. In contrast, 37% of diversion offenders and 51% of felony defendants had a new arrest;
- For those who were re-arrested, the average time to failure ranged from 232 days for felony defendants and 244 days for diversion offenders up to 415 days for drug court participants, regardless of graduation status;
- Drug Court graduates had a lower rates of re-arrest (20%) than those who were terminated from the program (33%);
- If we use any drug arrest, including DUI as the measure of recidivism, only 13% drug court participants had new drug arrest. In contrast, 20% of diversion offenders and 30% of felony defendants had a new drug arrest;
- For those who were re-arrested (any new drug arrest), the average time to failure ranged from 241 days for felony defendants and 263 days for diversion offenders up to 450 days for drug court participants, regardless of graduation status;
- Drug Court graduates had a much lower rate or re-arrest ( 10%) than those who were terminated from the program (19%);
- Regardless of which recidivism measure of re-arrest we use, high risk offenders tend to fail more quickly than of low or medium risk. In addition, Program graduates had lower rates of

re-arrest than those who were terminated from the program. We did not find any significant difference in new arrest by gender, ethnicity, or program size

- Overall, when the experimental cohort was compared to offenders on diversion and offenders who went to trial, the proportion re-arrested was lower and the time to re-arrest was longer. In terms of recidivism, Drug Court seems to be more effective for medium or high risk participants, than low risk ones.

### ***Los Ageless Drug Court is effective for all participants***

To sum it up, the results of the analyses clearly indicate that the drug court participants are less likely to fail (be re-arrested) both during and following the drug court program in comparison both to lower risk offenders who are on diversion and higher risk offenders whose cases may go to trial (felony defendants). In addition, we did not find any significant difference in time to new arrest by gender, age, or program size.

What are the costs of this success? The final section of this study presents the results of the analyses of drug court treatment costs. This is, however, a first step in exploring the drug court treatment cost. The cost model we used is limited in scope because the data included mostly direct service costs and a minimum of variable service costs. Moreover, many costs included in this model do not belong to the traditional treatment costs. Therefore, drug court treatment costs can vary extensively for different types of clients (e.g., level of difficulty) and for the types of services provided (e.g., drug test, food, housing, and transportation assistance).

Our preliminary findings for drug court treatment costs are:



- The average program treatment cost is between \$15 and \$22 per client per day. Compared to the California average cost per day of \$15 per person for substance abuse treatment, the smaller treatment programs started from above and below this average and later converged towards the California average. Cost per client per day for the larger program, however, climbed to almost twice the California average cost by the third year;
- Drug court treatment costs varied significantly by program size. To the extent that smaller programs provide more services, the larger the variable costs;
- The average yearly cost per client for program graduates ranged from a low of \$3,706 to a high of \$8,924. Again, the reasons for this wide variation are due to variability of client caseload, of treatment modality, of staff utilization, and of services that are needed for drug court. In comparison to the estimated average yearly cost of probation (\$1,200), prison (\$16,500), or residential drug treatment (\$13,000), *the drug court program appears to be a reasonable alternative that has higher rates of success;*

### **Recommendations**

Because current substance abuse clients have multiple problems (e.g., homeless, dually diagnosed, etc) when they enter into treatment programs, providers should assess various services and develop effective treatment modalities that match individual client needs. Client characteristics and their particular needs directly affect the drug court treatment costs.

- Drug court treatment functions differently at different phases of the program. Initially, it works like a day treatment or intensive outpatient program. At later phases, the program more closely resembles a typical outpatient-counseling program. Because costs are heavily loaded at the beginning of the program, cost control should focus on better screening of clients.
- Oftentimes, program managers are unable to control cost or utilization because clients enter or leave the program only as ordered by the court. If courts do not refer a sufficient number of clients, then the cost per client is high. Similarly, if clients stay in the program longer than planned, then the cost per episode can be higher (later phase clients require less time & resources from the program than early phase clients do).

- The cost of direct service staff remains the largest single component of the budget in providing treatment. Thus, allocating their time effectively is crucial in managing the costs of a drug court program.
- Program-focused cost models, which deal with line item budget detail, have utility in contract negotiation and oversight. Client-focused cost models, which are driven by mandated utilization factors, are more useful in program management.
- Whatever the service mix, drug court treatment is far less expensive and far more effective in terms of lower rates of re-arrest than an equivalent time in jail or prison and may be less expensive than diversion when participants fail to complete the program and are processed back through the system. Attention should be paid, however, to the increasing costs over time of maintaining or improving the services provided by the program.
- The important variables for improving drug courts include: more effective screening of clients; matching treatment modalities to individual clients; providing a service mix that matches the range of client-specific treatment need; closely matching the treatment services to client phase development; collecting more detailed cost data and separating direct treatment costs from ancillary costs that vary widely by client characteristics, treatment modality, staff utilization, and program size, and finally, maintaining ongoing data collection, monitoring, and data analysis; and
- Finally, despite the favorable outcomes of this study, further research is necessary to determine whether this early success has continued and if it is demonstrated in the next generation of drug courts that were implemented between 1997 and 2000. Ultimately, the results of this evaluation are limited because the study only included the original four drug courts from inception to 1997. Further research is needed to compare these four courts to the new drug court programs currently in operation in LA County and to provide a more long-term follow-up of drug court participants in comparison to other felony drug offenders.



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Summer 1999

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